

On the Beat Minneapolis VA Health Care System

December 2013



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"On the Beat" is published monthly for patients, employees, volunteers and friends of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

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ON THE COVER

Surprised and Humbled, Amy Archer Named Center's Supervisor of Year

When Minneapolis VA Social Work Executive **Amy Archer** was asked to step forward at the monthly meeting of the medical center leadership on Nov. 21, she had no idea what was about to take place.

So when the Medical Center Director **Pat Kelly** presented the annual supervisor of the year award, she was "totally surprised and humbled."

"I had no idea," she said. "All I was told is that I had to be at the meeting and it was very important."

In the nomination, Ms. Archer was described in the following statements:

- "She has provided outstanding service and leadership at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.
- She demonstrates outstanding dedication, competence, conscientious performance, excellent customer service and ingenuity.
- She creates a positive and motivating work environment, encouraging personal and professional development of staff.
- She inspires others to work at their highest skill level, acknowledging and rewarding staff for their accomplishments.
- She has a passion for excellence and ethical standards which provides a model for others.
- She has demonstrated an exceptional ability to foster collaboration, communication and cooperation among her colleagues and is an exceptional advocate for the social work profession."

Archer, who supervises a staff of 25 Primary Care PSL social workers, chaplains and patient advocates, said she is proud to work with an excellent group of people. "They make my job easy because of their professionalism, compassion and commitment to our mission," Archer said.

When asked by Kelly what advice she could offer other supervisors, **Archer** said: "I really feel that integrity is important; be honest with your staff. I try my best to include them in decisions. I believe that if people feel they have a voice, they are more likely to support the policy or process."

Archer has a BA in social work and psychology from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and a Master's from St. Thomas/St. Catherine's University. After a one year internship at VAMC, she became a full-time staff social worker in 1998. She was named interim Minneapolis VA Social Work Executive in 2009, and the permanent executive two years later.

OTHER SUPERVISOR NOMINEES: Sid Bell, LuAnn Cecil, Julie Wagner, Todd Harelstad, Marcus Syverson, Nicole Warren and Angela Chudzik.

‘We Need to Help Him’

VA CBOC Team Aids Accident Victim Following Crash

The Minneapolis VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) leadership team was about 30 minutes late for its Dec. 11 meeting at the Rochester Clinic.

They had a good reason.

As they approached Cannon Falls on Hwy 52, they observed two vehicles in a ditch, and debris scattered over the roadway. An accident had occurred just moments before.

Richard Pope, business office administrator, was driving the government vehicle. “I pulled over to the side and noticed a man in a van, slumped over the steering wheel,” he said.

Clyde Markon, MD, CBOC medical director, said, “We need to help him.”

Markon maneuvered through the debris on the roadway, and slid down the embankment to the wrecked vehicle. After assessing the driver’s condition, he helped him out of the vehicle. The outside temperature was below zero and the windows of the crashed vehicle were demolished. To prevent frostbite, the gentleman needed to be moved into a warmer situation.

With the assistance of Pope and Lori Baier, CBOC nurse manager, they put the man into the government vehicle until the ambulance arrived about 15 minutes later.

“He was dazed and confused,” Baier said. “Dr. Markon knew exactly what to do.”

The gentleman could not recall his age. He was concerned about his checkbook, which was still in the crashed vehicle.

Pope went back to the wreck and fortunately found the checkbook on the floor of the backseat. When it was returned to the injured man, he calmed down.

After talking with police, the CBOC team resumed their trip to Rochester.

“It took a while to decompress,” said Baier. “I’m just glad there weren’t any serious injuries.”



‘Wear Plaid Week’ in Neurosurgery Department

For five days in November, the Neurosurgery Department celebrated “Plaid Week.” Seated (L-R): Sharon Syverson RN Coordinator and Miriam Ulrich, Social Worker. Standing (L-R): John Laymon— Nurse Practitioner; Dr. Dino Terzic, Resident; Dr. Edward Hames, Staff; Jana Kelly—Zimmer, Spine Rep. The MD’s even wore the plaid caps to the OR where they could be seen underneath their scrub caps!! Dr. Terzic decided he liked the plaid lead vest best in the OR as well! Overall, it was a huge success! Now next month stay tuned for our Ugly Sweater week.

***VA is reaching out to young
Veterans who may not know
about their healthcare benefits***

Changing Behavior Sometimes a Slow Process

"I'm not growing radishes; I'm growing orchids."



Brad Foss

That's how outreach case worker Brad Foss describes his work with young veterans in Western Wisconsin.

For the past five years, Foss has been working in the trenches. He's spent Saturdays at the drill halls, weekends at post-deployment re-integration events. Beginning in 2011, he began spending one day a week on college campuses.

"When these guys get back from overseas, where they've been part of a huge bureaucracy and all 'amped up,' they are not about to join another huge system in the VA," he said. "It takes some time before they 'get it.'"

To 'get it,' means enrolling in the VA for healthcare benefits. Service members from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have a five-year window after military service to register with the VA.

"You have to remember, most of these guys are in their 20s. They don't care about a little back pain. They've been in the military so they have been trained to 'tough it out.'"

Foss says moving young combat veterans into VA health care follows the behavior change continuum.

"Most of them aren't even at the pre-contemplation stage," said Foss, a licensed social worker and Veteran himself. He served with the US Army Reserves in a combat stress unit and was deployed during the first Gulf War.

Building a relationship and establishing trust helps move the Veteran through the continuum.

According to Foss, here's a typical conversation with a combat Veteran:

FOSS: "Does your back hurt?"

VETERAN: "Yeah."

FOSS: "How are you dealing with it?"

VETERAN: "All right."

FOSS: "You might want to get it taken care of now because in another 20, 30 or 40 years, you aren't going to be all right. You're going to be in one heck' of a lot of pain."

VETERAN: "Yeah."

The problem, according to Foss, health care is not a priority of 20-year olds, whether they were in the military or not. The goal of Foss and other OEF/OIF outreach workers is to enroll veterans who qualify for healthcare benefits. He applauds the work of the CBOC post-deployment clinics and Chippewa Falls Vet Center staffs have been terrific.

It's his job to motivate the veteran to take the next step. The challenge is to get them to enroll.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

MINNEAPOLIS VA LANDS 2-YEAR GRANT

VITAL Program Reaches Veterans on the College Campus

When Katy Strub meets a young combat veteran on a college campus, her goal is to create a conversation.



Katy Strub

“It begins with establishing trust,” said Strub, coordinator of the Veterans Integration To Academic Leadership (VITAL) program at the Minneapolis VA. “Once they realize I’m here to help, then the veteran is willing to talk with me.”

VITAL is a Veteran-centered, results oriented, collaboration between the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and higher education. Minneapolis VA is one of 21 grant-funded programs in the country.

“We strive to enhance academic retention and success by meeting the student Veteran (or service member) where they are – on campus,” said Strub, who previously worked on the polytrauma inpatient unit before joining the OEF/OIF/OND team last year. Other team members also visit the seven schools in the VITAL program.

“I had the opportunity to work with many young veterans, some who faced serious injuries. I’m familiar with the challenges they face when they return from combat.”

As the VITAL coordinator, Strub builds rapport with student-veterans by her visibility. She spends time in the campus vet centers, and makes information available at health fairs on campus. As she has become more visible on college campuses, veterans have begun to seek her out.

“I consider myself a problem-solver,” she said. “If a veteran has a benefit question, I know where to go. If the veteran is struggling with emotional issues, I can connect them with a crisis intervention resource.”

Ms. Strub also spends time educating college administrators and professors about the needs of young veterans.

VITAL College Sites

University of Minnesota – Twin Cities,

Anoka-Ramsey Community College (Coon Rapids Campus)

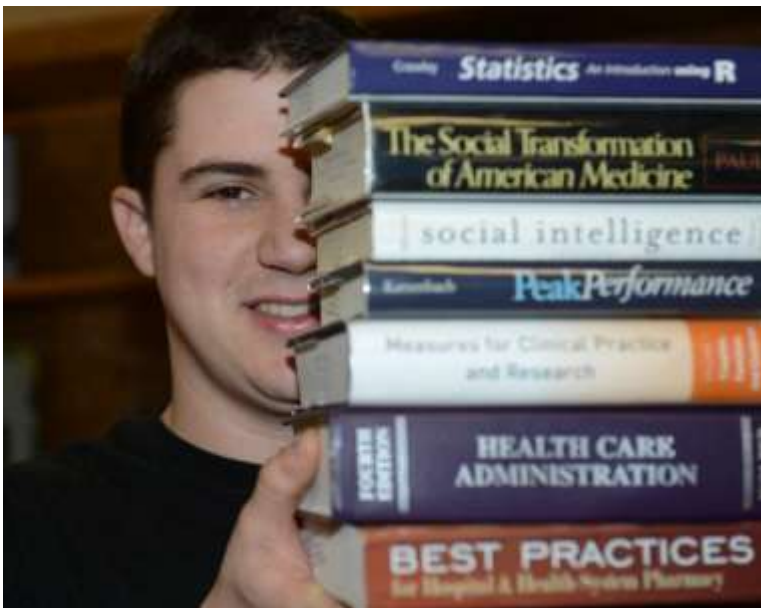
Normandale Community College

Hennepin Technical College

Inver Hills Community College

Minneapolis Community & Technical College

Minnesota State/Mankato



“The overwhelming majority of faculty and staff support and respect veterans at their respective schools,” Strub said. “Our goals are the same. We want Veterans to have every opportunity for successful reintegration and to complete their educational goals!”

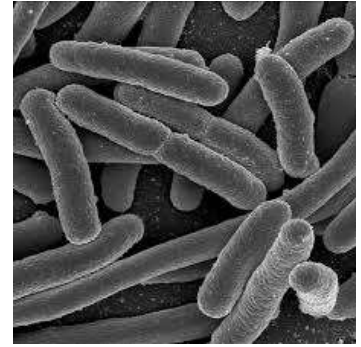
What makes the program worthwhile?

“It’s hard enough to adjust to civilian life after military service. On top of that, college life has its own challenges. And many of these young men, and women, have families and jobs. If I can help

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

E. coli Epidemic Traced to One Strain of Bacteria

In the past decade, a single strain of *Escherichia coli*, or *E. coli*, has become the main cause of bacterial infections in women and the elderly by invading the bladder and kidneys, according to a study published Dec. 17 in the American Society for Microbiology's open access journal *mBio*. The VA's **James Johnson**, MD, is a co-author of the study, which drew significant press coverage.



Besides becoming more resistant to antibiotics, the strain H30-Rx gained an unprecedented ability to spread from the urinary tract to the blood, leading to the most lethal form of **bacterial infections — sepsis— and posing a looming threat to the more than 10 million** Americans who annually suffer from urinary tract infections (UTIs).



Dr. Johnson

This new study could help trace the evolutionary history of this superbug and possibly lead to the development of a vaccine, according to Lance B. Price, Ph.D., the study's lead author. Price is a professor of environmental and occupational health at the George Washington University School of Public Health. Previous research suggested that the ST131 group of *E. coli* — a family of many genetically related strains of bacteria — had independently gained resistance to antibiotics through separate genetic events. The ST131 group had been identified as a major

source of superbugs — microbes resistant to multiple antibiotics — among UTI bacteria. If true, the existence of many different resilient strains would prove a formidable threat with multiple ways of evading the immune system and medical treatment, according to the new study.

Using advanced genomic techniques, researchers discovered that the ST131 strains represented genetic clones abruptly evolved from a single strain of *E. coli*. Using whole-genome sequencing — spelling out, in order, each molecule of DNA — researchers analyzed the genomes of *E. coli* samples from patients and animals in five countries over 48 years, 1963-2011. They created a family tree tracing how the superbug clones emerged as the result of discrete genetic events.

“This strain of *E. coli* spreads from person to person and seems to be particularly virulent,” **Johnson said**. “This study might help us develop better tools to identify, stop or prevent its spread by finding better ways to block the transmission of the superbug, or by finding a diagnostic test that would help doctors identify such an infection early on — before it might have the chance to turn lethal.”

VA Cooperative Colorectal Cancer Study Open to Veterans

The VA Cooperative Studies Program (CSP) 577 trial entitled: Colonoscopy Versus Fecal Immunochemical Test in Reducing Mortality from Colorectal Cancer (CONFIRM) is enrolling participants at the Minneapolis VA. Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in the United States. This study compares two of the most common screening tests; colonoscopy vs. fecal immunochemical test (FIT). Colonoscopy uses a flexible tube with a camera on the end to look inside the colon whereas the FIT uses a stool sample to look for evidence of blood. Eligibility includes Veterans aged 50-75 years due for colorectal cancer screening, without symptoms of colorectal disease, and no strong family history of colorectal cancer. For more information, please contact the research coordinators, Ruth Anway or Mary Lindquist 612-467-2860.



Chief of Staff Dr. Crossley (I) presents Laanui with award at Minneapolis VA leadership meeting

New VA Staffer Receives Top Civilian Award for Prior Work at Landstuhl

David Laanui, who joined the Minneapolis VA three months ago to head the Healthcare Operations Cell (a.k.a. Data Cell) in the Chief of Staff Office, was awarded the Superior Civilian Service Award in recognition of his work at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, just prior to coming to the VA. It is the third highest award of the Department of the Army. At Landstuhl, Laanui was an advisor to the commander and deputy commander. During his service, he worked for five different generals. He headed a section of 17 staff that included business planning, data quality, manpower analysis, workload measurement and performance management. The “Data Cell” is a newly establish team with the mission to simplify and

standardize the analysis of VHA data. The aim of the team is to transform our vast amounts of VA data into knowledge to support the Minneapolis VA HCS leadership and staff to make informed, data-driven, patient-centered decisions

Milestones—Congratulations

30 YEARS

Aaron Porter

Patient Advocate

Linda Mickelson, VCS

Rachel Anderson

Primary Care

Susan Aiken

Enviro Health

25 YEARS

James Markert

Primary Care

Gayle Breutzman

Specialty Care

Karen Berndt

Specialty Care

Jeanne Topping

Mental Health

Daniel Ignatowicz,

Mental Health

Agnes Jensen,

Research

Carol Myslivecek,

Specialty Care

Leslie Borgen,

Specialty Care

20 YEARS

Brian Conley

Research

Edward Gallagher,

Specialty Care

Loma Ezumah,

Primary Care

David Wunderlich

Biomed

Lynn Busse, Primary Care

Tina Kaplan, Primary Care

Meredith Sokoloski,

Pathology/Lab

Janet Cota, Primary Care

15 YEARS

Allan Lieder, Primary Care

Jacquelin Kochevar,

Specialty Care

Gerald Schill, Chaplain

Melissa Partin, Research

10 YEARS

David Lawler, ECR

Brenda Phipps

Primary Care

Love Addo, Primary Care

Melonie Maitland

Pharmacy

Shannon Washington

Laboratory

Diane Leclair

Sommerville

Specialty Care

Alice Campbell,

Specialty Care

Ray Hell

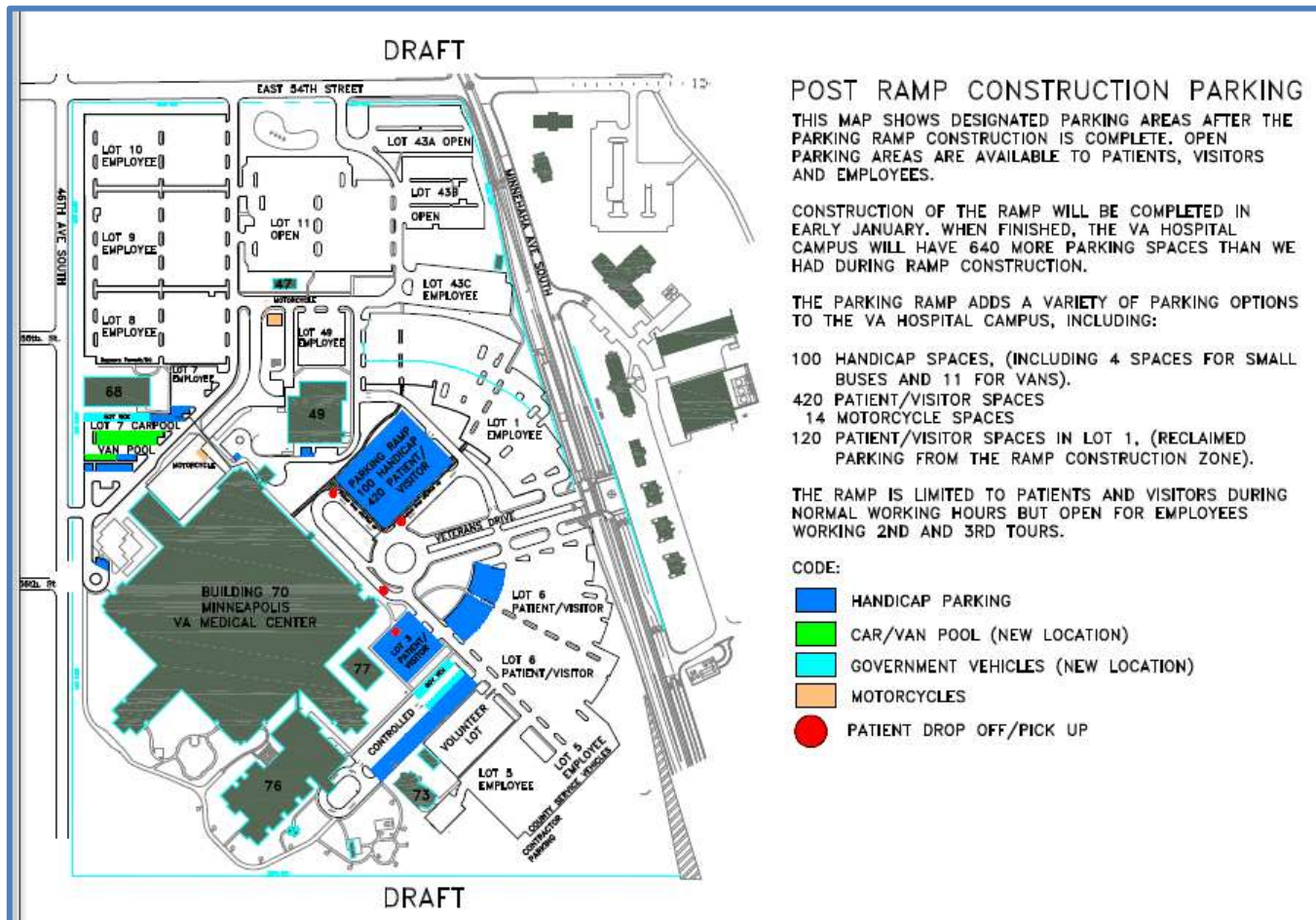
Environmental Health

Jonathan Gair

Primary Care

Kim Corcoran, ECR

Ramp to Open in January - New Parking Plan



OUTREACH TO YOUNG VETERANS – FROM PAGE 4

Behavior change involves removing barriers. “Let’s make it as easy as possible. Maybe some day we could have a VA Call In center for enrollment,” Foss said. All they need is a DD214 form, which can now be obtained by the VA through data sharing agreement with the Department of Defense.

Based on his professional training and personal experiences, Foss can identify young veterans who may be struggling mentally or emotionally.

“Here’s my spiel. Any memory loss? Irritable; Can’t sleep? People getting on your nerves?” When they ask me, ‘How’d you know,’ I say, “It’s not how I know, it’s what I can do to help you. Welcome home.” Foss directs struggling veterans to the Vet Center in Chippewa Falls or the campus counseling center.

VITAL PROGRAM ON CAMPUS – FROM PAGE 5

in some small way to reduce the burden, then I feel that I’m making a difference,” Strub said.

At the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, the VITAL program offers weekly sessions with a VA psychologist. Many universities offer campus counselors but VA staff are familiar with the unique experiences of military veterans. VA is looking for ways to add mental health staff on other campuses in the future.